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THE OPERATIONS OF "E" COMPANY, -381st INFANTRY (96th INFANTRY
DIVISION), IN THE ATTACK AND CONSOLIDATION OF POSITIONS
ON KAKAZU WEST, OKINAWA
10-15 APRIL 1945
(RYUKYUS CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: THE PARTICIPATION OF A RIFLE
COMPANY IN THE ATTACK, CONSOLIDATION, AND HOLDING OF A
CRITICAL TERRAIN FEATURE IN ISLAND WARFARE

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of E Company, 381st Infantry, in the attack, consolidation of positions and holding of its assigned sector of KAKAZU WEST, Okinawa during the period 10-15 April 1945 (Ryukyus Campaign).

In order that the reader may be brought abreast of the situation as existed on the aforementioned dates, it will be necessary to look back and examine incidents leading to the period of action to be described.

As a result of successful operations of the UNITED STATES FORCES in the Pacific in the capture of island bases, the stage was set for the NANSEI SHOTO CHAIN (Ryukyus) campaign, designated as Operation ICEBURG. (1) The capture of this group of islands would open the backdoor to the Japanese homeland, a mere 640 miles distance. (See Map A)

According to plans formulated and issued during February 1945, the United States Tenth Army was landed and supported by one of the greatest naval armadas of history on 1 April 1945. The Tenth Army, made up of the 1st Amphibious Corps and the XXIV Army Corps, a total of four divisions (two Army, two Marine), Corps and Army troops, landed practically unopposed in the vicinity of HAGUSHI. The scheme of maneuver called for the landing of the two corps abreast, of two divisions each, disposed from north to south in the following order: 6th Marine Division, 1st Marine Division, 7th Infantry Division, and the 96th Infantry Division. (2) (See Map B)

(1) A-10, p. 13; A-2, p. 77 & 79

(2) A-1, p. 17-79

All divisions (as has been stated) landed successfully and each set about the accomplishment of its assigned missions. Since this narrative deals with a subordinate unit of the 96th Infantry Division, it behooves us to examine the assigned mission and progress of that outfit. In jist, the mission assigned was that of securing the beach-head and surrounding commanding terrain, advance rapidly inward, secure the objective line marked L / 10 at the earliest possible date, be prepared to continue the advance to the south on Corps order, protect the Corps right flank, and maintain contact with the 7th Division on the left. (3) All these assigned missions were carried out to the extent that the phase line L / 10 was held by the division on L / 3 (3 April 1945). (4) (See Map B)

The assault regiments of the 96th Division had advanced to the previously mentioned L / 10 phase line without encountering any appreciable enemy resistance. On that date additional orders were received from Corps directing a continued attack to the south to seize the URASOE MURA hill mass in the division zone. For this continued attack the 381st Infantry reverted to Division reserve, with the 382nd on the east (left) and the 383rd on the west (right). The 381st RCT went into reserve positions in the vicinity of Futema, while the two assault regiments continued the attack against steadily increasing resistance. By 8 April 1945 the assault regiments had advanced to a line running generally from UCHITOMARI to KANIKU. (5) (See Map C)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

Having examined the scheme of maneuver of the Tenth Army in landing troops on the hostile shores of Okinawa, let us look back and see the dispositions of the Japanese forces at the time of the landing and consider from a broad viewpoint the Japanese plan of defense. The Island of Okinawa was garrisoned by the Japanese 32nd Army, under the command of Lt. Gen.

(3) A-6, p.I

(4) A-6, Part I, p. 3-6

(5) A-6, Part I, p. 6-10

Mitsuru USHIJIMA. Intelligence estimates placed the strength of the 32nd Army at approximately 56,000-58,000 combat troops; major units consisting of the 62nd Division, 24th Division, 44th Independent Mixed Brigade, 27th Tank Regiment, the 1st Artillery Mortar Regiment, and an assortment of independent artillery and naval units. The foregoing units were augmented by approximately 20,000 Boetai (Okinawa draftees). (The 9th Division had been moved from Okinawa to Formosa in December 1944.) (6) It was ascertained, after the landing by the Tenth US Army was effected, that the 32nd Japanese Army had a total strength in excess of 100,000 men. (7) The elements of the Japanese 32nd Army, with the exception of approximately one regiment of Boetai and two battalions of the 2nd Infantry Unit, were committed to strong defensive positions along the line NAHA-SHURI and south in depth. The first main line of resistance was established along the rugged high ground just north of SHURI-NAHA, with outposts in depth from the line TOGUCHI-CHATAN (63rd Brigade). (See Map B) This was in accordance with the over-all Japanese plan of an unopposed landing, allowing the Japanese Air and Sea Units to destroy shipping and logistical support of the landed troops. The over-all plan envisaged the ultimate loss of the island, only, however, after having delayed the US troops for as long as physically possible and having inflicted maximum casualties through a tenacious defense of the strongly fortified positions in the vicinity of Shuri-south. (8)

While the assaulting regiments were pounding at the enemy outposts during the period of 3-7 April 1945, the elements of the 381st Infantry were busily engaged in reorganization and reorientation. The orders to the regiments had been simple enough. To the attacking regiments: continue advancing within their zones and seize their respective portions of the division objective; to the reserve regiment: move into assembly areas in the

(6) A-5, p. 2-4

(7) A-1, p. 91

(8) A-5, Part V; A-1, p. 84-96

vicinity of FUTEEMA. (9) (See Map C)

Progress of the attacking regiments was slow but steady through 7 April. The 382nd Infantry encountered heavy resistance on that date in the vicinity of KANIKU and NISHIBARU, while the 383rd fought to the vicinity of UCHITIMARA, just north of the ill-famed KAKAZU RIDGE. (10)

There had been no particular problems of logistics during the early stages of the campaign, other than the fact that the entire 96th Infantry Division had landed short of some critical items of supply and was understrength by 39 officers and 1,167 enlisted men. (11) The road net in the Division zone of action left much to be desired. It consisted of a north-south highway of doubtful two way capacity; this highway was at best a restricted passage for heavy transport and at worst a non-traversable quagmire of gummy mud when wet. (12) From the very outset of the operation there was an available supply rate imposed on 81 mm mortar ammunition and some calibres of artillery ammunition. The weather through 4 April 1945 had been favorable to the attackers; however, on 5 April rains started and continued intermittently through 14 April. (13) The terrain confronting the 96th Division was not particularly rough, but definitely favored the defender. It consisted of a series of ridges, one behind the other from the landing beaches to the southern shores, particularly suited to the organization of defensive positions. These ridges and hill masses were liberally sprinkled with wooded areas and native tombs. The latter formed excellent networks of fortified positions--each amounting to a veritable pillbox, as they were constructed with slabs of granite averaging two to three feet in thickness, and capable of accommodating four to twelve armed men and a crew served weapon. (14)

(9) A-5, Part 1, p.6

(10) A-1, p. 104-107, 108-113

(11) A-2, p. 79

(12) Personal knowledge

(13) A-7, p. 21; Personal knowledge

(14) Personal knowledge

DISPOSITION AND PLANS OF THE 381st RCT

As has been stated, the 381st RCT was in Division Reserve, occupying assembly areas in the vicinity of FUTEMA. The regimental plan of action called for reorganization and preparation for continuance of battle in the zone of either attacking regiment. In the event of commitment, the regimental commander planned to utilize the 3rd and 2nd battalions as attacking troops. (15) Tactical events called for the commitment of the 3rd battalion on 8 April 1945 in the zone of the 383rd RCT. This battalion entered the lines on the extreme west flank of the division zone and captured UCHITOMARI. (16) (See Map D)

On 8 April 1945 the 2nd battalion was moved from the vicinity of FUTEMA to assembly areas approximately 1000 yards east of MASHIKI. (See Map D) The battalion held this position for the period of approximately 081400 April 1945 - 091100 9 April 1945. This move had been directed by the regimental commander so that the battalion would be in position for commitment without delay. (17)

On 9 April 1945 certain events took place that were destined to cause the regimental commander to place into effect his plan of commitment of elements of his regiment if directed to do so. Leaving the battalion situation for a minute, let us have a hasty examination of the turn of events that were to play such a major role in the lives of members of the 2nd Battalion, 381st RCT during the forthcoming six days. On the morning of 9 April 1945, the 383rd Infantry had launched an attack against strong enemy positions on KAKAZU RIDGE, - these positions actually constituted the Japanese 32nd Army's first line of resistance. This attack was ill-fated from the very beginning. In spite of bitter fighting throughout the day, it became obvious by mid-afternoon to the higher commanders that the attack would fail.

(15) Statement of Col. M.E. Halloran, Commanding 381 RCT

(16) A-2, p. 108

(17) Personal knowledge

Accordingly, Brig. General Claudius EASLEY, Asst Div Commander, called a meeting of the commanders of all three regiments in the CP of the 383rd RCT before the sounds of the attack had died away. He directed the regimental commanders to launch a coordinated attack on the following morning, supported by artillery and navy gun fire, to seize KAKAZU RIDGE and KAKAZU-WEST, and be prepared to continue the attack to the south to seize the Division objective: URASOE MURA. The attack was scheduled for 0700, Line of Departure to be the Line of Contact, 381st Inf on the West, 383rd in the center and the 382nd on the East(left). (18) (See Map E)

The plan of the regimental commander, Colonel M. E. HALLORAN, 381st Infantry, remained basically the same. He would employ the 2nd Battalion in the assault of KAKAZU WEST, the battalion having moved during the day to an assembly area on the very eastern outskirts of MASHIKI. The 3rd Battalion would hold its positions in UCHITIMARI and support the attack from those positions. The 1st Battalion would close into an assembly area to the rear of the 2nd Battalion and be prepared for commitment in either the zone of the 381st or 383rd Infantry. (19)

The order issued by the regimental commander to the battalion commander of the 2nd Battalion was basically the same as the one issued by General EASLEY. The 2nd Battalion, from its assembly area would launch an attack in its zone the following morning, commencing at 0700, to seize that portion of KAKAZU RIDGE and KAKAZU-WEST lying in its sector, and be prepared to continue the attack to the south to seize the portion of URASOE MURA lying in its zone of responsibility. A fifteen minute preparation would be fired by four organic and three attached artillery battalions, including two Marine battalions. Cannon and Anti-tank Companies would be in General Support. General support would be rendered by Co. B 88th Chem Mortar Battalion. Tank attachments would not be made due to terrain difficulties. Line of Depart-

(18) A-6, p. 11

(19) Personal statement of Col. Halloran, then commanding 381st RCT

ure would be the Line of Contact; supply and evacuation initially by carrying parties; Regimental CP would be located east of MASHIKI. (20)

DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF THE 2nd BATTALION

During the morning of 9 April 1945, Lt. Col. Russell GRAYBILL ordered the battalion to move from the assembly area occupied the night of 8-9 April 1945 to an assembly area on the eastern outskirts of MASHIKI. The latter was considered a better assembly area as the cover for the troops was superior to that of the then occupied positions. During the night 8-9 April the battalion had received intense artillery and mortar bombardments for several hours, with an estimated thousand rounds falling on the battalion area within a four hour period. The battalion moved at approximately noon, and spent the greater part of the afternoon closing into and preparing positions in the new assembly area. (See Maps D & E) It was necessary to arrange a perimeter defense even in an assembly area due to the action of Japanese infiltrators. (21)

Approximately thirty minutes before nightfall of 9 April 1945, all company commanders were called to the battalion CP and were issued an attack order for the following morning. The attack order was simple, but tactically sound, - based primarily on an almost SOP attack plan. Companies E and F, E on the east (left), would cross the line of departure, following the artillery preparation, at 0700 the following morning. Company G was to be in reserve with Company H supporting the attack, and Battalion Headquarters Company committed to supply and administrative support. The attacking companies, after crossing the Line of Departure, would attack to the south, seizing those portions of KAKAZU-WEST in their zones of operation and be prepared to continue the attack to seize portions of URASOE MURA on order. (22)

The battalion commander's plan envisaged a rapid attack across the intervening 400-600 yards to the objective, a final assault, and a mop-up

(20) Statements made by Capt. Dave Tudor, S-3, 2nd Battalion, 381st Inf.

(21) Personal knowledge

(22) Personal knowledge

by the reserve company. The Headquarters Company personnel would follow the reserve company, bringing supplies to a forward supply point on the rear slopes of the objective and evacuate casualties on return trips to the rear. The battalion aid station would remain in position until the objective was seized, then move a section forward to the objective to establish and operate a forward aid-station. Each attacking company would have forward observers from the artillery units and the mortar platoon of Company H. The support from Company H would be general in nature, from positions in the vicinity of the Line of Departure. (23)

During the discussion and question period following the attack orders, it was brought out by the F Company Commander that it was his belief that the terrain in the west (right) sector of the battalion was unsuitable even for foot troops, since it appeared to be a rice paddy. (This information came from the 3rd Battalion) The battalion commander decided to have the left company (Company E) attack through the west sector of the 383rd Infantry. This decision was not met pleasantly by the company commander of E Company, who had been able to ascertain that the terrain in that area had less cover than the originally assigned sector of operations. His suggestion that the attack be conducted by a column of companies, E Company leading, was turned down by the battalion commander. (24)

The battalion staff was not able to furnish much information relative to the enemy situation, other than they were occupying strong positions on the forward and reverse slopes of the objective, and that it was suspected that the defense included several pillbox type fortifications, as well as numerous cave positions. The objective was not very high in elevation, approximately 100 feet and did not seem to be too rugged. (No mention was made of the gorge that existed at the base of the ridge line.) (25)

(23) Personal knowledge

(24) Personal knowledge

(25) Personal knowledge

The issuance of the order required the entire remaining period of daylight, allowing no time for reconnaissance. With this disturbing condition foremost in mind, the company commanders returned to their companies to make their plans and issue their orders.

COMPANY E PLAN OF ATTACK AND PREPARATIONS THEREFOR (26)

The company commander, his executive officer, and weapons platoon leader returned from the battalion CP and immediately began formulating plans for the attack. Prior experience had proven the best formation for the attack included two platoons, 1st and 3rd, in the attack, supported by fire (if possible) of the support platoon (2nd). As the general support for the attack seemed adequate, it was decided to have the weapons of the weapons platoon accompany the attacking echelon: the mortars to follow the 1st Platoon on the east (left), with the machine guns advancing in the interval between the attacking platoons. The Command Post group, with the Forward Observers, was to remain in positions in the vicinity of the support platoon along the Line of Departure, until such time as ordered to move forward or serious communications problems should arise. The company commander would be accompanied by the weapons platoon leader, the communications sergeant (with SCR 300), three messengers, an orderly, and a wire team of three men.

It was expected that supply and service problems would constitute the greatest difficulty of resupplying mortar ammunition and maintaining a continuous effective communication system. In order to insure success in maintaining an adequate supply of mortar ammunition and grenades, it was decided that all men in the attacking echelons not carrying crew served weapons and ammunition for those weapons, flame throwers, BAR's, or heavy communication equipment would carry one round of sixty mm mortar ammunition and four hand grenades. The Command Post group and the support platoon would carry three mortar rounds and five grenades each. Officers and pla-

(26) Personal knowledge

toon sergeants would carry extra ammunition at their discretion. In order to insure effective communications during the attack and during the subsequent defense of any objectives seized, it was decided that the fifteen sound powered telephones that were operational (many had been obtained by very dubious means) would be carried and allotted as follows: four to each rifle platoon, one to the mortar section, and two to company headquarters. During the attack a wire team of three men from company headquarters would follow the company commander, laying sound powered telephone wire from the Command Post group left at the Line of Departure. One SCR 300 would accompany the company commander and one would be left with the company executive officer; the five SCR 536's would be allotted one to each rifle platoon, one to the mortar section, and one with the company commander. It was felt that this communication set-up would allow control of the attacking units, contact with the support platoon, contact with the second in command of the company, and a speedy method of contact with the observers of the supporting weapons.

As the company had been assigned a sector of operations to the east (left) of its positions in the assembly area, it was feared that the movement to the Line of Departure would be observed and result in exposure to enemy fire. To alleviate this danger, it was decided to have the company move to the LD under the cover of darkness. To accomplish this, the company would be awakened or alerted at 0500 the following morning, allowed forty-five minutes for breakfast and assembly of equipment, and an hour to post guides and move the command to the LD. The guides, three from each rifle platoon, would report to the CP at 0545, prepared to move out immediately. The company would be brought to the Line of Departure by the executive officer at 0600, directed to positions by the guides posted by the company commander, who would move to the LD at 0545. The order of movement, in brief, was to be command party, first platoon, light machine gun section, third platoon, mortar section, and Command Post group.

The foregoing plans were put into order form and an attack order issued to the subordinate commanders approximately thirty minutes after the company commander's return from receiving the battalion order. After it was definite that all subordinate leaders understood their missions, and all questions answered, they were released to make their own plans and orders and prepare for the attack.

NARRATION

THE ATTACK ON KAKAZU WEST (See Map F)

According to the plan evolved on the previous day the personnel of E Co, 381st RCT were alerted at 0500 on the morning of 10 April 1945. To say that the men were alerted at that time is somewhat of an ambiguous statement, as the majority had been awake for the entire night in anticipation of the big push scheduled at daylight. For the ensuing forty five minutes the men were allowed to arrange their combat packs and prepare their breakfasts of C rations over meager fires or heat tablets ignited in the sanctity of the Okinawa tombs. During this period the officers and non-commissioned officers moved continuously from squad to squad, and individual to individual, checking and rechecking to see that the additional equipment and ammunition was present and that all instructions were understood. (27) Promptly at 0545 the guides from each of the rifle platoons reported to the company command post and the company commander, his orderly, messengers from each platoon, weapons platoon leader and the communications sergeant departed, accompanied by the guides, for the Line of Departure, which was only about two hundred and fifty yards distance. As was previously planned, a guide was stationed at each turn of the trail or at any point where confusion might arise. (28)

The company commanders party, minus the majority of the guides ar-

(27) Personal knowledge

(28) Personal knowledge

rived at the Line of Departure at approximately 0600. No fire of any type was falling in the area and the situation was so static and quiet that it was an effort to fully comprehend that the area to the front was soon to become a bloody battlefield. The two remaining guides were posted to direct the arriving troops to their relative positions along the Line of Departure. While awaiting the arrival of the remainder of the company, the company commander advanced approximately one hundred and fifty yards to the front of the Line of Departure to study the terrain to his front, since this had been prohibited by the lack of time at the issuance of the attack order. Although it was barely nautical twilight at the time, it was soon obvious that the majority, if not all, of the terrain to the front was almost as level as the proverbial billiard table, and almost as devoid of cover. At this time the company commander experienced his first of several regrets that he had not insisted that the battalion commander allow the battalion to attack in a column of companies, led by E Company through the zone of attack presently assigned to F Company. The time was then approximately 0615 and it was getting lighter by the minute, so the company commander returned to the line of departure to make a check of preparations at that point. (29)

Upon returning to the line of departure the company commander found that the executive officer, 1st Lt. Maurice DOUTHIT, had placed all personnel in positions taking advantage of all available cover and was making a constant check of light and noise discipline. The executive officer and the platoon leaders were immediately acquainted with the condition of the terrain to the front and some of the difficulties that could be expected. The foremost difficulty expected, and all subordinate leaders were warned accordingly, was the fact that we could expect the men to seek cover of any type and tend to remain in that cover for too great a length of time. This situation would result in a slow attack, lacking vigorous action, and would tend to cause bunching of personnel, affording the enemy lucrative mortar

(29) Personal knowledge

targets. It was decided to orient the men on the conditions expected and inform them that their surest safety and achievement of success rested in their ability to continue moving at all times humanly possible. (30)

By the time this information had been disseminated to all the troops, the pre-attack bombardment, scheduled for 0645, incorporating seven battalions of artillery, two companies of 4.2 chemical mortars, naval gunfire, and 81 mm mortar platoons from the 383rd and 381st RCT, had commenced. (31) In addition to this pre-attack bombardment, friends and foe alike were pelted by a miserably cold rain. By this time it was felt that it was sufficiently light and the enemy had sufficient diversion to allow the men to smoke; accordingly the order was put out that the smoking lamp was lit. This seemed to relieve the tension to some extent and the usual GI banter, heretofore missing for the day, could be heard up and down the line. The intensity of the artillery preparation raised the morale of the men immensely for they felt that the enemy could not possibly survive such a bombardment. Added to this was the fact that the barrage lasted for a full thirty minutes, whereas they had anticipated only a fifteen minute preparation.

At approximately 0700 the men of E Company, 381st RCT moved out to test their mettle against the elements of the Japanese 13th Battalion, 63rd Brigade, which had previously fought the 383rd RCT to a stand still. As has been stated, the men were extremely confident that the artillery preparation had done its job, and all that would remain for the infantry would be a movement to the objective and a mop-up thereon. This feeling was to be short lived for the assault elements had advanced a mere fifty yards when machine gun, rifle and 50 mm mortar fire was received throughout the line. The initial volume of fire exacted the toll of three wound-

(30) Personal knowledge

(31) Personal knowledge; A-1, p. 120

ed. As had been expected the men sought out folds in the ground and shell holes, tended to bunch in those spots and showed little desire to continue forward movement. The company commander moved throughout the line and sent personnel forward, and ordered the platoon leaders to do the same. Action of this type on the part of all officers and non-commissioned officers was continued throughout the attack. (32)

It is of interest to note at this time that communication within the company, to battalion and to the artillery forward observers was at its best. The SCR 536 Radios were all functioning as though they had read the technical manuals and were endeavoring to live up to their capabilities. The attack was progressing at a rate that allowed the messenger carrying the reel of wire and sound powered telephone to keep wire layed along the pre-designated route of advance of the company commander. The SCR 300 (including the extra set with the executive officer) was functioning beautifully - and the radio operator had thus far managed to avoid the casualty list. (33)

As the company progressed across the open terrain, it was obvious to all that the findings of the company commander previous to the attack were entirely too correct. The only existing cover were occasional shell holes and small irregularities in the ground surface. Continuous movement by all personnel saved many men from being added to the daily casualty list. By this time it could be ascertained with some degree of accuracy from whence a great deal of the enemy fire was originating. The executive officer with the support platoon was contacted and directed to have the supporting fires of the support platoon directed at those points within the battalion zone of action that could be seen. The weapons platoon leader, who was accompanying the company commander was directed to set up two of the three mortars in shell holes and direct fire against targets in the zone of action of the 383rd RCT, as well as within the zone of action of the 2nd Battalion. This

(32) Personal experience

(33) Personal experience

failed to alleviate to any appreciable degree the intensity of fire, especially the mortar fire, (34)

The company had been attacking for approximately one hour and was still several hundred yards short of the immediate objective, with very little respite from the intense enemy fire. The company commander decided to request smoke from the supporting artillery, so accordingly had the messenger laying sound-powered wire connect the telephone and contacted the artillery forward observer accompanying the company. The smoke was requested in the right sector of the 383rd Infantry, as it was felt that the largest volume of fire was either originating or being observed from there. In a short time the Arty. FO contacted the company commander and advised that the forward elements of the 383rd Infantry had advanced to within casualty range of the point designated as the smoke target; consequently, the mission could not be fired. From the front line positions it was obvious that some commander had been inaccurate in reporting his progress because it was easily discernible that the most advanced elements of the 383rd RCT were on line with or in rear of E Company, 381st RCT. The Artillery FO could not fire the mission, however, so the commanding officer of H Company, 381st RCT, Captain Dixie DUGAN, was contacted and the same request tendered him. After some bickering and exchange of profanities, he agreed to fire a limited concentration of white phosphorous on the target area designated. The attacking elements of the company were advised that the concentration was forthcoming and that they would be prepared to move forward rapidly and vigorously under the cover of the smoke to positions from which an assault could be launched. (35)

Lieutenants LANDFRIED and JURIC passed the word of the coming smoke concentration to their men and had them ready to move out under its cover. As soon as the concentration had built up to its effective density, the

(34) Personal experience

(35) Personal experience

entire company moved forward a distance of approximately one hundred yards and halted on a generally straight line, some fifty to a hundred yards short of the base of KAKAZU WEST. It was soon apparent why the troops had prematurely halted: to their immediate front was a gorge of approximately thirty feet in depth, the near (northern) bank of which was precipitous. In addition to the natural obstacle confronting the men, it was soon obvious that the entire gorge was a barrage area of enemy mortars and artillery of all calibres. The intensity of the barrages being fired in this area was such that it was felt that an attempted crossing to the immediate front would result in approximately one third casualties in the company. To the west (right) of E Company sector, at approximately 0830, men of F Company could be seen working forward crossing a narrow natural bridge over the gorge that was miraculously free of fire. It was decided to move the company across this same route and fan out again on the objective. The battalion commander and F Company commander were so notified. (36)

In the meantime, the company executive officer had started the movement forward of the support platoon and the company headquarters group, after having been ordered to do so by the company commander. The movement forward was to take place over a comparatively covered route in F Company's zone of advance under the protective cover of the smoke previously mentioned. (37)

The support platoon was moving forward with only scattered mortar fire being received and practically all of F Company was across the gorge by this time. The east (left) platoon of the company was ordered to hold positions along the gorge and support the assault of the remainder of the company and F Company. The Company Commander of F Company upon moving his entire company across the gorge turned to the east (left) instead of to the west (as previously decided) and started cleaning out Japanese positions on the northeast slopes of KAKAZU-WEST. This left no alternative to E Company other than

(36) Personal experience

(37) Personal experience

crossing the gorge and securing the west (right) sector of KAKAZU-WEST. The original right assault platoon and the heretofore support platoon were moved across the gorge by infiltration and reorganized for the assault of the right section of KAKAZU-WEST. The decision to redesignate support platoons proved wise as several enemy emplacements were encountered that required the special attention of the flame thrower teams, both of which had been attached to the support platoon. The assault and mop-up of the newly assumed sector of responsibility took place without undue difficulty, leaving E and F Company the holders of the reverse slopes of KAKAZU-WEST. (See Map F) A speedy reorganization and continuance of the attack was deemed necessary, as it was the consensus of opinion that the Japanese would not allow this serious penetration to remain any longer than they could help it. E Company pushed out on the right and F Company on the left (in reverse of the start of the attack) but were met by withering small arms fire and a futile counter attack. The artillery forward observers with the attacking companies had immediately, upon reaching the objective, started the collection of firing data and arranging defensive fires. The battalion commander ordered the ground that had been taken held at all costs and await the advance of the 383rd RCT on the east (left). He also advised that the support company was being sent forward to assist in consolidation of ground taken. (38)

Within a comparatively short time the remainder of the battalion moved onto KAKAZU-WEST and the Battalion Commander ordered E Company back into its original sector and G Company into the lines on the west (right) compressing F Company in the center. This lateral movement was made without mishap, but certainly with many feelings of misgivings that the Japanese might elect to counter attack at that particular time. Several additional attempts were made by the original attacking companies to extend the gains beyond the crest of the ridge, but each was met with intense fire and counter attack. The battalion commander issued the order at approximately 1245

(38) Personal knowledge; A-1, p. 121

to dig in and hold the ground taken. He further stated that each company would put all strength on the outer perimeter to form an "impenetrable line". (39)

CONSOLIDATION OF POSITIONS ON KAKAZU-WEST (1st Day) (See Map G)

Shortly before the noon hour on 10 April 1945, impeded by a steady rain, Company E moved laterally to the north-east slopes of KAKAZU-WEST, prepared to continue the advance or assume the defensive. As has been previously stated, several abortive attempts were made by the battalion to advance the line of gain with no success. In between the attacks the men of the company had been digging hasty positions of safety and utilizing Japanese emplacements for cover. They supported by fire the attempts of the 383rd RCT to move onto KAKAZU RIDGE. The lines of the company were passed through by elements of the 3rd Bn, 383rd RCT at approximately noon. The men of the company went with them in spirit and supported them by fire as they had never done before. This attack met with a slight degree of success, in that the attacking troops were able to move into the saddle between KAKAZU-WEST and KAKAZU, but were there stopped. This pitifully insufficient force held for several hours until a superior enemy attacking force, supported by a blanket of supporting fire caused them to withdraw. In spite of the intensity of the fire delivered by the men from E Company, the elements of the 383rd found it necessary to withdraw by the same route they had attacked. (40)

By this time it seemed obvious to the company commander that a strong likelihood existed that his company would have to hold during the coming night the undesirable position presently occupied. He anticipated that the Japanese would redouble their efforts to regain the lost ground during the night. Accordingly, plans were started to effectively defend the terrain. It was learned from the heavy weapons company commander that all the heavy

(39) Personal knowledge

(40) Personal knowledge; A-1, p. 122-123

machine guns would be employed in F and G Company sectors (the center and right of the battalion) as the battalion commander feared a penetration from that direction. It was agreed with the F Company Commander that the flanks would be tied in at a certain point, and a detailed reconnaissance was conducted. During the reconnaissance the executive officer had selected a Command Post location in the general vicinity of the center of the company and about fifteen yards to the rear of the front line. With the assistance of the weapons platoon leader, the company commander decided on the platoon sectors and locations of the weapons of the weapons platoon. (41) (See Map G)

The plans and orders were issued to the platoon leaders as soon as they were formulated. The entire company sector of the perimeter covered only about two hundred yards, which resulted in a very compact and tight defense. When this restriction was noted it was called to the battalion commander's attention and a request was made to allow one of the platoons to be held in reserve positions. This request was denied; consequently, all three rifle platoons were placed in line, with each assigned a sector of less than seventy five yards. The Platoons were to be disposed from west (right) to east (left) in the following order: second, commanded by T/Sgt. (later 2nd Lt) O'CONNELL; third, commanded by 2nd Lt. JURIC; and first, commanded by 1st Lt. LANDFRIED. The mortar section was located to the rear of the third platoon and the machine gun section was emplaced in the third platoon left flank sector, covering the saddle between KAKAZU and KAKAZU-WEST. BAR's of the second platoon tied in with the section of lights from F Company. (42)

The platoon leaders were left to prepare their defensive positions and plans and attention was directed to the installation of the command post and arrangement of protective artillery fires. The company executive officer had installed the command post in the court yard of one of the na-.

(41) Personal knowledge

(42) Personal knowledge

tive tombs, with the plan of putting communications, supplies and a first aid station in the tomb itself. It was pointed out that the court yard would not accomodate the personnel of the command post group plus the attachments, so the exec expanded the CP to include an adjacent tomb court yard. The latter location was connected to the Command Post proper by a stone wall passage-way, allowing almost unrestricted passage at all times of day or night. The Command Post proper contained the company commander and his headquarters group, a liaison party from the 593rd JASCO, a forward observer party from division artillery, an aid man, and the weapons platoon leader. The adjacent position contained two forward observer parties from the attached Marine artillery battalion, a forward observer party from the 88th Chemical Mortar Battalion, a forward observer from the heavy weapons company, and a litter bearer squad. (43)

As soon as the platoon leaders had notified the executive officer of the locations of their platoon CP's, the communications sergeant, assisted by several messengers started the task of laying sound powered wire to the platoons. Having several hours before darkness, he was able to lay wire over three separate routes, one of which was strung from tree to tree, at least six feet from the ground at all points. Complete utilization was made of all fifteen sound powered telephones that the communications sergeant had procured in ways most dubious. To clarify this, the arrangement was as follows: one to the company CP, one to the auxiliary CP, one to the mortar section, and four to each rifle platoon. (The company executive officer had made himself a human pack-horse for the operation and had personally carried nine telephones plus six rounds of sixty mm mortar ammunition.) This telephonic system was to be the primary means of communications as long as it stayed operational. In the event of failure the platoons were to resort to their SCR 536's, which to our amazement were still operational. (44)

(43) Personal knowledge

(44) Personal experience

By this time all the extra mortar ammunition had been collected and deposited on site of the mortar position. A carrying party from the battalion supply point had managed to get through to the battalion and a meagre amount of water was available for distribution to the troops. Rations were no problem as the men had brought sufficient K Rations to last through breakfast of the coming day. Captain (then 1st Lt.) Willie COMSTOCK, 593rd JASCO, arranged for harrassing naval fires during the coming night and obtained final instructions relative to illumination on call. The forward observer parties had registered and plotted defensive fires to the front and flanks, and had received recognition and approval of these fires from the artillery liaison officer with the battalion headquarters. Battalion had established communications with all companies and had advised each of the locations of such installations as the aid station. The primary communications to battalion was to be the EE 8, field telephone, with the SCR 300 being utilized in case of failure of wire communication. (45)

The men in the rifle platoons were not fairing as well as the men of the headquarters, because of the nature of the terrain. The ground was rocky, and in many locations was almost solid limestone or coral. The digging was extremely difficult at best, and was not helped any by the rain that continued to fall. In spite of the odds, all men had succeeded in preparing three-men positions by at least a half hour before dark. A final inspection of the defenses revealed a very tight defense, but still left the nagging fear of lacking a defense in depth and adequate support, (46)

Concurrent with all preparations for the defense, E Company had supported by fire several unsuccessful attempts of the 1st Bn, 381st RCT to gain KAKAZU RIDGE. (47)

With nightfall eminent, the company settled down to await the ex-

(45) Personal experience

(46) Personal Knowledge

(47) A-1, p. 123

pected enemy attacks under cover of darkness. Upon returning to the company command post, the company commander found that the Marines had failed to bring any rations with them for the operation. Sufficient rations were rounded up from men having extras and from the packs of evacuated casualties to amply provide those that had failed to come prepared. This amounted to somewhat of an exchange of rations, in as much as each Marine (Officer and enlisted man alike) had filled his pack with two ounce bottles of brandy. Needless to say, two ounces of brandy after a day of Hell was an unexpected blessing. (48)

Contrary to the expectations of all concerned, the Japanese did not launch any attacks of appreciable strength during the first night. There were, however, many abortive efforts made by individuals and small units during the hours of darkness. At times during the night groups of the enemy could be heard across the crest of KAKAZU-WEST and KAKAZU, which seemed to indicate that an attack was brewing. So well had the artillery forward observers planned their fires, that a prearranged concentration could be placed on each locality of enemy activity, thus forestalling any attack being formulated. (49)

Casualties were evacuated from the front line units after dark and supplies were brought up. The uncomplaining cooks, mail clerks and personnel of Battalion Headquarters Company were the unsung heroes of this particular phase of the operation. These carrying parties were harrassed throughout the entire night, as were the front line units, by continuous mortar and artillery fire. (50)

The end of the day of 10 April 1945 did not bring forth a mission accomplished by any stretch of the imagination, for none of the participating units had succeeded in fully gaining its objective. The 2nd Battalion, 381st RCT, had, however, made an appreciable inroad into the main

(48) Personal knowledge

(49) Personal knowledge

(50) A-2, p. 109

Japanese defensive line. (51) The operation for the day had cost E Company a total of eleven casualties. In spite of the fatigue, casualties taken, and the continued rain the morale of the men was at a superior level at the close of the days operation, although its operational effectiveness was approximately 75%. (52)

THE SECOND DAY (11 April 1945)

After a sleepless and almost restless night on KAKAZU-WEST, the men of E Company were stirring with the dawn of 11 April 1945, preparing to continue the attack. Those that had any appetite at all consumed their unsavory K Rations and awaited impending orders. The battalion commander notified all concerned that the 1st Bn, 381st Inf, would again attempt a reduction of KAKAZU RIDGE, commencing at 0700. (53) All elements of the 2nd Bn. would assist and support by fire the efforts of the attacking troops. As E Company occupied the positions providing the maximum degree of observation over the enemy positions, it naturally fell its lot to render the majority of support. Instructions were issued to the men, and all was in readiness by 0700. The men of the company fired at every thing that moved or gave an indication that it might be capable of moving. The mortars fired at every known target and every suspected target locality. It seemed that the efforts would be rewarded, for the forward elements of the attacking troops drove to within twenty yards of the crest of KAKAZU RIDGE. (54) At this point they were met by an enemy barrage that included everything from hand grenades and satchel charges to 150 mm howitzer shells. (With every man of E Company firing at the maximum rate, the enemy still managed to get some of its personnel forward to throw grenades and satchel charges.) This barrage halted the attack of the 1st Bn, and forced it to dig in at that spot.

(51) A-2, p. 109

(52) Personal knowledge

(53) A-2, p. 111

(54) A-2, p. 111

A second attack, supported as had been the first, was launched by the 3rd Bn, 383rd RCT and the 1st Bn, 381st RCT, at 1300. (55) This attack also met with failure. The commanding officer of the attacking forces (Lt. Col. STARE) decided that if the attack were to succeed at all, the 2nd Bn would have to attack simultaneously to relieve pressure from the rear of KAKAZU-WEST. This was a sound decision and met the concurrence of the 2nd Bn Commander, Lt. Col. GRAYBILL, who issued an order to his battalion to continue the attack at 1430 hours. At almost the precise time for the attack, the 2nd Bn was hit by a counter attack that was launched with great vigor and tenacity, but was fortunately not of great proportions. The counter attack was halted, but so were the plans for the continued attack of KAKAZU by our own troops. (56)

The remainder of the afternoon of 11 April 1945 was spent in improving individual positions, reissuing ammunition, assisting carrying parties to bring rations and supplies forward, evacuation of the wounded, and distribution of rations and water. It was decided to bring in one of the artillery concentrations to approximately one hundred and fifty yards of the front lines. This was accomplished by the Marine forward observers. As on the previous day, the men settled down with dark for a watchful and sleepless night. (57)

The coming of nightfall marked the commencement of an almost constant bombardment of front line positions by Japanese artillery. Fortunately the men were reasonably well dug in and no casualties were suffered. At the termination of each barrage, lights were noted to flash to the rear of the company in some bypassed cave positions dug into the north bank of the gorge. Agreeing with the surmision of the artillery forward observer parties that the flashing lights might be some means of communications employed by the Japanese, the company commander decided to have all the

(55) A-1, p. 124

(56) A-1, p. 124

(57) Personal knowledge

caves destroyed the following day. Sporadic and ineffective counter attacks were intermittently launched during the night, none of which were of any consequence. (58)

THE THIRD DAY or THE JAPANESE COUNTER OFFENSIVE (12 April 1945)

With the advent of dawn of the third day, the company commander assigned the first platoon the mission of clearing out all cave positions to the immediate rear of the company. Lt. LANDFRIED'S platoon accomplished this mission in a matter of minutes, killing a few by-passed Japanese soldiers, sending to the rear an assortment of civilians, and effectively sealing four or five caves. Whether this action ever assisted in easing the almost constant artillery concentrations will never be known,- it did improve the morale of the troops, as each felt that the intense artillery concentrations were directly attributable to the signal lights. (59)

No sooner had the cave positions been reduced than orders were received to continue the attack to the south. Accordingly the 2nd Battalion endeavored to push over the crest of KAKAZU-WEST and the 1st Bn. continued its attack on KAKAZU RIDGE. The latter effort was preceded by an air strike. Similar to previous attempts, the attacking troops were hit with every thing the enemy could throw. The men of E Company were almost immediately pinned down by fire coming from the rear of KAKAZU RIDGE itself. After repeated attempts by the platoon leaders and company commanders of all companies in the 2nd Battalion to goad the men into moving into the devastating fire had failed, the battalion commander directed that the attack be stopped and original positions be reoccupied. (60)

The attacking elements on KAKAZU had fared no better and had ceased their efforts after three successive attacks had failed to achieve success. They too pulled back to original positions. (61)

(58) Personal knowledge

(59) Personal knowledge

(60) Personal knowledge

(61) A-1, p. 125

Later in the day, after several minor counter attacks had been halted short of the front lines, the battalion commander directed the company commander to send a patrol forward of the front lines to ascertain the extent of damage already inflicted on the enemy and to estimate the possibility of success of another attack by the battalion. This mission was assigned to S/Sgt SMITH of the first platoon, who had by this time established a reputation for capable leadership and accurate reporting of information. Sgt. SMITH, with one squad, was sent through G Company's sector on the west (right) rather than directly across the crest of the hill. This afforded him some degree of protection from the withering fires that were known to originate from the rear of the main part of KAKAZU RIDGE. Before the passage of many minutes, it was obvious to all listening that the enemy still occupied the rear portion of KAKAZU-WEST. A terrific volume of fire could be heard from the vicinity of the assumed location of Sgt. SMITH'S patrol. Judging from the intensity of fire, no one would have been surprised had no survivors from the patrol returned. Contrary to all expectations, however, Sgt. SMITH led his entire patrol back through F Company front lines with only one casualty. His report stated that he came under direct fire from the high ground approximately 1000 yards south of KAKAZU RIDGE (URASOEMURA), positions on KAKAZU-WEST, and positions to the rear of KAKAZU RIDGE. His estimate placed the number of enemy casualties on the reverse slopes of KAKAZU-WEST at approximately one hundred and fifty, all apparently as a result of artillery and mortar fire. Although his withdrawal had been hasty, it had been deliberate to the extent that one of his men returned the proud possessor of a Samurai sword removed from the body of a Japanese officer. (62)

It was on 12 April 1945 that the men on KAKAZU and KAKAZU-WEST learned of the death of their Commander in Chief, President Franklin D. ROOSEVELT. Their suffering and pains probably alleviated the full tragic effect of the news, for no suffering could be greater or more intense than that they were

(62) Personal knowledge

undergoing at the time. (63)

Once again the fading daylight hours had seen no success in the lines of the 381st Infantry. The results of the days activities were nil; however, the Japanese had failed to dislodge the 2nd Battalion from its slender foothold. The forthcoming hours of darkness found a more fatigued, but even more determined group of defenders than on the previous day. The days activities had at least been successful to the extent that the meagre supply of rations, water, and ammunition had been built up in each company to a sizeable amount. So once again resupplied with food, water and ammunition, the defenders prepared to throw back any attack that might be launched against them. None of those gallant defenders fully realized how sorely their strength would be tried before daylight cast its welcome rays again- nor how many of them would fail to greet the dawn of another day.

At approximately 1900 hours brilliant enemy flares were observed over the front line positions. This was followed by an artillery and mortar concentration that lasted until approximately 0300 hours 13 April 1945. This concentration was almost continuous from 1900 until 0300, and included every artillery and mortar the Japanese had from the 50 mm grenade discharger to the 320 mm spigot mortar. Although this bombardment was probably the most intensive ever suffered by men of E Company, no casualties resulted, as they were well dug in. To everyone concerned this preparation could mean but one thing- a counter attack was developing. (64) How well planned and intense this plan would prove to be was not evident to any of the U S Forces until several hours later.

Although unknown to the American attacking forces, the Japanese high command on OKINAWA had formulated a plan for a general counter-offensive, the date for the execution having been set for 12-13 April 1945. The original plan, formulated at a Japanese Staff meeting on 6 April called

(63) A-2, p. 112

(64) A-1, p. 132-133

for an all out counter offensive, conducted by the 24th and 62nd Divisions and the 44th Independent Brigade. Strong objection to this plan was manifested by the more conservative members of General USHIJIMA'S staff. After discussions pro and con for several days, it was decided at a subsequent staff meeting (9 or 10 April) to launch the counter-offensive with a lesser strength than originally planned. According to the new plan of action, only three Infantry battalions (reinforced) would participate in the action. At the last minute, on the date of the proposed execution of the attack, General USHIJIMA, advised by Col. YAHARA, changed the plan to include only four battalions. The general plan called for a massed infiltration of the front lines and subsequent attacks on Tenth Army rear installations. (65)

As has been stated the American troops were completely unaware, until the intense Japanese bombardment commenced on the night of 12 April, that a Japanese counter-offensive was scheduled. After approximately six to eight hours of miserable existence in foxholes, praying constantly that the next round wouldn't "strike home", the front line units were given some respite from the terrific bombardment, as it lifted to rear areas. This left each man wondering what was next on the agenda.

At approximately 0300 the front lines of E Company was hit in several places by small enemy detachments. Reports from the other two companies in line revealed that they had suffered the same action. Fortunately two of the original three telephone lines installed by the company were in operation and one of the battalion lines was functional; consequently, communication presented no problem throughout the bombardment and the harrassing action of enemy foot elements. Not knowing whether the enemy was merely probing the lines or was succeeding in actually infiltrating small units into the position, the company commander asked Lt. COMSTOCK, 593rd JASCO, to request illumination from the supporting Navy gunfire units. This request was denied due to an enemy air-raid alert. (It was not until

approximately 0400 that illumination was obtained.) Each action at the front lines was marked by audible activity on the reverse slopes of KAKAZU and KAKAZU-WEST. These activities were immediately taken under fire by the supporting artillery, firing barrages that had been previously planned. These sorties of relatively minor nature (none amounting to more than a platoon sized group) lasted for about forty-five minutes. At approximately 0345 PFC FLYNN performed an almost unheard of feat in the Pacific, in that he ran the entire length of the company front line to advise that a platoon from F Company had vacated their positions in the lines and had left the west (right) flank of E Company exposed. To the best of his (Flynn's) knowledge, the enemy were at that present moment availing themselves of the break in the lines and penetrating the battalion perimeter. Pfc FLYNN had barely reported to the CP when bitter fighting broke out over the entire sector and in the area of the 1st Bn, 381st RCT. Reports from the platoon leaders began coming in continuously that they were being hit by a well coordinated attack. At approximately 0400 the mortar section called to state that they were practically being over-run and that only two mortars were operational, the other having been knocked out by a hand grenade. The mortar section leader advised that he was firing both mortars flat trajectory into a large tree that was situated in the approximate center of the vacated sector of F Company's lines. The results of this action were highly gratifying in that over two thirds of the shells were bursting in the tree, thereby giving the effect of air bursts over the danger area. The battle continued in intensity throughout the area, so it seemed that the damage had been done and a rather large group of the enemy had managed to pass through the lines before they could be stopped. As a result of this penetration every man was forced to fight as an individual, directing his attention to all points of the compass. Deeds of heroism became the rule and not the exception- a soldier caught a grenade between his legs

and allowed it to explode rather than have the crew of his mortar knocked out; another mashed a grenade into the ground with his foot and thereby saved the life of his comrade sharing the foxhole; and still another choked a Japanese soldier to death in spite of a serious gunshot wound. The reports of these actions were being received continuously, as one of the telephone wires (the one strung from the trees) was still functioning. Reports to battalion were a little more difficult, however, as it was now necessary to depend on the SCR 300 radio. (66)

Illumination was obtained from the Navy at approximately 0420, which rendered the task of destroying the enemy and holding the position easier. By stating that the task became easier does in no way intone that the battle immediately became less serious or that the foothold of the 2nd Battalion became less precarious. All the personnel of the company CP were on the alert and were fighting as hard as any of the riflemen. Apparently the CP had been designated as a target to a group of demolition specialists, as it was taken under attack by a group of approximately twenty enemy armed with satchel charges. The attacking group did not succeed in knocking out the CP, but they did manage to hurl several of the satchel charges and one shaped charge into the CP location wounding two men. In fact, when dawn bathed the battle scene with light, it was ascertained that six of the enemy had actually been killed within the physical confines of the CP. (67)

By the grace of God and the US Navy illumination shells, the gallant group of defenders managed to retain their positions for the ensuing hour and a half of darkness. With the advent of nautical twilight, the company commander led the left (first) platoon in a skirmish line through the length of the company area and made "good" Japs out of approximately twenty-two live Japs. The wounded that had not made their way to the company

(66) Personal knowledge

(67) A-1, p. 135; A-8

aid station in the CP were collected and all carried to the Battalion Aid Station. The executive officer made rapid redistribution of ammunition and effected an issue of water to all personnel. The communications sergeant repaired one of the telephone wires to the platoons (the wire had been cut with wire cutters). The platoon leaders readjusted their positions. Bodies of the enemy dead were searched for intelligence matter, resulting in the discovery that every non-commissioned officer had in his possession an accurate and detailed sketch of the entire company defensive area. A survey of the situation revealed that one hundred and thirty six of the enemy had been destroyed within the company defensive positions. (68)

No praise is too great for the artillery forward observers who controlled the protective fires during the counter attack. Their efforts were untiring and the calibre of the support they directed was evidenced by the fact that after the ridge was finally secured, six hundred bodies (Japanese) were found in a common grave on the reverse slopes of KAKAZU-WEST and the 272nd Independent Battalion was practically annihilated. It is well conceivable that without the aid of the Naval illumination, directed by members of the 593rd JASCO, the hard fought for foot-hold of KAKAZU-WEST might have been lost during the trying hours between 0420 and 0530 hours, 14 April 1945. (69)

There had been no dull moments during the action of 12-13 April 1945. The situation had been precarious at many times, but never did the morale of the men of the company falter nor their will and determination to fight. Those factors, coupled with the acme of support by all supporting arms, saw them emerge victorious from the well planned, conceived and coordinated counter-offensive. Possibly it would be better to say that the counter-offensive had been ill-conceived, for it had been broken up and one of the better fighting units of the 32nd Army had been rendered ineffective for

(68) A-9

(69) Personal knowledge

further combat for some time. The enemy had not been entirely unsuccessful, for the casualties among the US Troops were numerous: E Company had suffered approximately thirteen.

THE FOURTH DAY (13 April 1945)

The enemy having been cleared out of the company positions, reorganizations effected, and administrative details accomplished, the company set about obtaining a minimum amount of rest following the ordeal of the previous night. Action was limited to patrols operating just over the crest of the hill. These patrols reported that the enemy dead were stacked like cord-wood on the other (south) side of the hill. (70)

Having discovered the detailed and accurate sketch of the company area carried by the Japanese non-commissioned officers, the company commander decided to change the defensive set-up of the company. His plan envisaged the use of only two platoons on the line and a support platoon to afford depth to the defense. At approximately 1000 hours, the company commander visited the battalion commander and requested permission to put his plan into effect. Permission was granted and it was learned that the battalion commander intended moving F Company into the saddle between KAKAZU RIDGE and KAKAZU-WEST for the remainder of the day and night. This was to forestall any subsequent attempts by the Japanese to use the saddle as a route of penetration to rear installations. The battalion commander further advised that he had directed that all personnel from the Battalion Headquarters Company, not actively engaged in carrying supplies to the front line position, and such personnel as cooks, armorers, and mail clerks of the rifle companies be sent to the front line position to bolster the defenses. The latter decision was met with some misgiving, for it was feared that some of the cooks would fight as they cooked-the situation would then indeed be grave. The execution of the battalion commanders orders was commenced at approximately noon. (71)

(70) A-1, p. 137

(71) Personal knowledge

The plan to remove one company from the line did not alter the company commander's decision to utilize a support platoon; accordingly, the second platoon was designated the support. The remaining two platoons were extended to cover the area vacated by the second platoon and approximately one third of the vacated area in F Company's sector (the other part of F Company sector was taken over by G Company, which had better fields of fire). The support position was designated and the mortar section slightly shifted to give better support to F Company, taking up positions in the saddle. It was also felt that shifting the mortars from the positions of horror of the preceding night would bolster the morale of the section. By mid-afternoon the reorganization of the defensive set-up was completed and the entire company was confident that they were in better position to meet action similar to that of the night before. (72)

The arrival of the cooks to the front line position was a sight that should have been recorded for posterity. Each man arrived carrying enough ammunition and grenades to have lasted a squad for a full day, and each was convinced that he would personally expend that ammunition and any more that would be issued. Amid the friendly jeers of comrades, the cooks and administrative personnel dug in at points of least likely enemy action. To say that they dug in is a gross under-statement, for not a man stopped digging until he had a hole that required a firing step for him to see over the top. (73)

Carrying parties during the day functioned unusually well. All casualties were evacuated and the sadly depleted stocks of ammunition were replenished. The executive officer personally saw to it that the company got its share of the water that was brought forward, and it was found that there was sufficient for the men to have a canteen for drinking purposes and enough to bathe the grime from their faces. This was a most welcome

(72) Personal knowledge

(73) Personal knowledge

factor for no one had bathed since the morning of the attack.

The night proved uneventful. Only two or three minor attempts were made by small groups to infiltrate the lines. These attempts were short lived. Numerous mortar concentrations were fired for F Company in the saddle, as they were struck by minor counter attacks on two occasions. (74)

THE FIFTH DAY (14 April 1945)

The only eventful action of the day was the return of F Company to its positions formerly held. This was accomplished during the morning under the cover of mortar concentrations fired by H Company and E Company mortars. The company commander of F Company returned completely exhausted and was given over to the battalion surgeon for treatment. When the battalion commander was advised that he was unable to continue the command of his company for at least twenty four hours, he (Bn. Cmdr.) rendered a decision that was most unexpected. He attached two rifle platoons and the machine gun section from F Company to G Company and the balance of the Company to E Company. His action was based upon the fact that he felt the chain of command of the company had disintegrated to the point that there were no officers remaining in the company capable of assuming command. The attached elements of F Company were incorporated into the defense plan with little additional effort. (75)

During the afternoon, the front line positions were visited by elements of the 106th Infantry Regiment, 27th Inf. Div. It was learned that a relief was to be effected the following morning. No news was ever heralded with greater pleasure. Capt. Del ZOPPO, commanding Company L, accompanied by certain of his key personnel was shown the defensive positions of the company, and various factors of tactical interest were pointed out. Particular emphasis was placed on location of barrage areas, both friendly and enemy. It was agreed that ammunition and supplies would be left on

(74) Personal knowledge

(75) Personal knowledge

location: the company commander of E Company would not agree to a weapons exchange, feeling that it was not necessary; it was further agreed that sound powered telephones would be exchanged in so far as the available supply of L Company permitted, thereby allowing a continuation of a communication system that had not ceased to function for the past five days. The final plan called for a relief by infiltration, in the following order: support platoon, the right platoon, light machine gun section, left platoon, the mortars, and finally company headquarters. (76)

The men of E Company met the night with renewed energy and high spirits in anticipation of the forthcoming relief. It might further be added that this feeling of elation was shared by officer and enlisted man alike. For the sake of climactic interest it should be possible to state that a terrific counter offensive was launched that night; that, however, is not the case. The night passed in an uneventful manner, much to the relief of all concerned.

THE SIXTH AND FINAL DAY- RELIEF (15 April 1945)

True to the plans of the previous day, the relieving elements began their movement into the area at approximately 0830, and the first elements of E Company started their movement to the rear a few minutes thereafter. The platoon leader of the first platoon was detached from his platoon and sent back with the first group to serve as acting commander of troops until the company commander should be able to move back. Guides were dropped along the way and the very open column was guided and directed to its reserve positions only a few thousand yards, but seemingly miles, from the front lines. Upon the relief of the last rifle platoon, the company commander declared the relief effected, turned the responsibility over to the new commander, and started to the rear, leaving the executive officer, the supply sergeant and the communications sergeant to complete all supply ex-

(76) Personal knowledge

change details. So culminated five and a half days of living Hell. (77)

By way of summary of the activities of the six day period it can most definitely be conceded that the operation was far from being a success, primarily because the mission of seizing KAKAZU RIDGE and KAKAZU-WEST and continuing the attack to capture URASOE-MURA had failed. But examining the other side of the ledger one can readily determine that the operation did not result in complete failure either. A serious indentation had been made in the enemy's first line of resistance- and indentation that refused to be removed, though struck with carefully planned and well executed counter attacks. During the battles for and on KAKAZU RIDGE, the fighting had cost the enemy 4663 killed, personnel that could not be replaced. (78) One Japanese independent battalion had been decimated; elements of the 63rd Brigade and 62nd Division had been hard hit in materiel and personnel; and the carefully planned and daring counter offensive of the Japanese 32nd Army had been stopped with no gain.

E Company of the 381st RCT had materially contributed its share to the limited success of the operation. It had aggressively carried out its share of the attack over the most unfavorable terrain; had successfully consolidated its positions on the limited part of the objective seized; had refused to be driven from its organized positions; had materially aided in the breaking of the Japanese counter-offensive of 12-13 April 1945; and had displayed a fighting spirit that was to be its standard throughout the remainder of the campaign on OKINAWA. The limited success achieved by the enemy was not obtained unscathed, however; the company suffered approximately thirty casualties for the six day period.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. AMPLE RECONNAISSANCE AND DETAILED INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION;

The operation covered in the preceding pages was characterized by a

(77) Personal knowledge

(78) A-6, p. 15

definite violation of the premise that subordinate leaders must be allowed sufficient time to conduct ample and detailed reconnaissances. From the very concept of the attack- the issuance of orders to Brig. Gen. Claudius EASLEY, commanding the task force that attacked KAKAZU RIDGE and KAKAZU-WEST on 10 April 1945, on down to the issuance and receipt of orders by the platoon leaders, time allotted to necessary reconnaissance was practically non-existent. Colonel Michael E. HALLORAN, Commanding Officer 381st RCT, received and passed on his orders in the waning hours of daylight on 9 April 1945. (79) Although Col. HALLORAN passed his orders on to the battalion commanders without delay, they did not reach the company commanders until such time as it was too dark to effectively study the terrain to the front. This resulted in the attacking companies moving into contact without sufficient terrain knowledge to effectively formulate decisions as to the best formations and plans of maneuver.

This condition could have been alleviated to some extent had accurate and timely terrain analyses been furnished the front line units. Until the gorge north of KAKAZU RIDGE was reached by the attacking troops, its existence had been unknown to the commanders of the attacking companies of the 2nd Battalion, 381st RCT. This information could easily have been passed on by the units making the efforts on the previous day, and could well have influenced the battalion commander to render a different decision as to the formation to be adopted by the battalion. It would have indeed influenced plans of action to move into the assault; and would definitely have alleviated the congestion that resulted at the edge of the gorge.

2. COMPLETE PRIOR PLANNING:

One of the highlights of the action, in so far as Company E was concerned, was the noticeable dividends of the prior plannings. The details that were anticipated and the long period of planning for the attack of the position and the subsequent defense of ground gained could be evaluat-

(79) Personal statement of Colonel Michael E. Halloran, former commanding officer of the 381st RCT

ed in ground seized and lives saved.

The fact that each man understood what his mission was to be and what action he was to follow in the attack was most instrumental in the success of a slow but decisive offensive operation. Having the men move under the cover of darkness, utilizing guides, to the Line of Departure prohibited the enemy from being forewarned, even for a short period, that an attack was eminent. The movement from the assembly area to the Line of Departure was orderly and without interruption as a result of the carefully planned use of guides. The attacking forces were kept moving during the attack as a result of the plan to prevent them from bunching in the infrequent spots of cover. It is felt that this factor alone resulted in the saving of several lives.

The anticipation of the difficulty of supply, and the plans for counteracting this logistical problem, materially aided the men of Company E in holding the ground seized. Had the men not been required to carry extra mortar ammunition, the supply would have been inadequate to effectively engage all targets of opportunity that presented themselves during the course of action of the first day and a half.

The detailed plans of defense allowed the company commander to remain fully cognizant of the situation at all times and effectively maintain and exercise control of his company even during the most critical periods of enemy activity. The carefully conceived plan of communications was the greatest contributing factor to the success of the company in meeting the enemy counter offensive of 12-13 April 1945. The knowledge that the company officers were in contact with all subordinate elements and that the entire company was holding against the enemy activity was made available to the majority of the men. That fact alone made the elaborate communication plan worthwhile.

The carefully conceived plan of relief effected by the companies

concerned allowed a rapid and uneventful relief, noticeably marked by the absence of confusion. So well planned and executed was the relief that it is doubted that the enemy was aware of its being carried out until it had been effected.

3. DECISIVE LEADERSHIP:

The action of Company E, both in the attack and defense, was characterized by bold positive action of its leaders, especially platoon and squad leaders. The example of bravery and self sacrifice influenced the men to similar feats. Positive action instilled confidence in all the personnel. The effects of leadership can best be determined by a comparison of action of all the platoons of the company with that of the one platoon of F Company that was allowed to withdraw from its positions, thereby allowing a strong group of the enemy to penetrate the battle position. The leader of that platoon was definitely not strong. The will to fight in E Company was strengthened by the actions of the platoon leaders, even though the situation appeared hopeless at times.

The action of the subordinate commanders in preventing the men from losing momentum in the attack saved many lives and resulted in a partial victory rather than an ignominious defeat. The unhesitating action of the platoon leaders to keep their men moving at all times called for the highest degree of courage and leadership. The results of this action cannot be measured in words, but in lives saved.

4. ANTICIPATED EXIGENCIES OF SUPPLY:

This particular phase of the critique has been fairly well covered in the analysis of the planning. It played such an important part, however, in the holding of the ground taken that it is believed that a reiteration is in order. As was anticipated at the outset of the operation, supply was a terrific problem. The entire supply route was under enemy observation, with the exception of a narrow trail through a small ravine. This

necessitated a hand carry of all supplies. It was natural that water, 81 mm mortar ammunition and food were given priority in the order listed.

A program of strict fire discipline and conservation of supplies of all types was placed in effect. The men were impressed with the fact that ten rounds of rifle ammunition weighed far less than one round of mortar ammunition; therefore, they would, when possible, make a rifle accomplish a mission that might ordinarily be assigned to a rifle company mortar.

The decision to have each man carry a round of mortar ammunition proved a wise one indeed. The extra weight was not so great that movement of the individual was impeded, yet the stock pile of ammunition at the site of the mortars was impressive. This stock pile enabled the company to more effectively meet enemy counter attacks, which would not have been true had the supply been dependent initially on carrying parties.

5. FLEXIBILITY:

One of the prime requirements of any tactical maneuver (as taught by the Infantry School) is the principle of flexibility. The action of the company was marked by its flexibility. The ease with which the tactical scheme and formation was changed at the gorge to permit the minimum shifting of troops was exemplary. This was possible only because of the extensive previous training that had knit the unit into a team.

The action of the battalion upon reaching the objective was characterized by its flexibility. F Company, being the first to move onto the enemy held terrain, immediately secured the most threatening portion, allowing E Company freedom to move into a new sector. This change of tactical formation and maneuver was accomplished without hitch, and it might seem that it had actually been planned in that manner. Both companies were immediately ready without faltering to continue the attack in new zones of action.

A third shining example was the ease of reorganization of the company

defense from a position utilizing all platoons on line to one of two platoons on line and one in support. This reorganization was accomplished with only the minimum amount of confusion and delay, appearing as though it had been scheduled for a considerable period of time.

6. DEPTH IN DEFENSE:

The first defensive positions, although to all appearances impenetrable, left much to be desired. It did encompass the principle of all round defense, but at the same time it violated the principle of depth. It was this violation that resulted in unnecessary casualties in the company mortar section on 12-13 April 1945. Had the position been organized in depth the penetration through F Company would not have affected the rear of E Company to the extent it did. In addition to the fact that it would have secured the rear of the company, it would have allowed the company commander a reserve force that he could have utilized to close the gap in the lines.

The reorganization of the company positions to include a support was so welcomed by all personnel that a bolstering of morale was noticeable from the moment of the issuance of the order. As will probably be agreed by all military leaders, confidence of the men is highly instrumental in the achievement of success in any mission.

7. ADEQUACY OF COMMUNICATIONS:

This factor has also been covered in the analysis of the planning of the operation, but its importance in the limited success of the operation warrants a little closer study. Although the TO/E of the rifle company did not authorize the total number of sound powered telephones in use, past experience had proven that practically any number in excess of that authorized could be used to advantage. The communications sergeant had done an outstanding job in repairing salvage equipment and recovering the telephones from the battle field- in fact such an outstanding job that the company had fifteen serviceable sound powered telephones. This en-

abled communications to be established to practically every squad on the line. This constant communication kept all men advised of the situation and enabled the company commander to receive vivid accounts of activity throughout the company, thus enabling him to render immediate decisions.

The decision to establish a minimum of three telephone lines throughout the company came as a result of previous operations. It had been learned in the past that all too frequently one and frequently two wires were severed in one night, but seldom three. It had also been learned that a wire suspended from trees at a minimum height of six feet was sufficiently high to prevent the normal Japanese infiltrator from encountering it in the darkness and cutting it.

8. COORDINATION BETWEEN SUPPORTING AND SUPPORTED UNITS :

The operations of the company had been materially aided to say the least, and in all probability made possible, by the excellent performance of the supporting units- particular praise being directed toward the 2nd and 3rd FA Battalions of the 11th Marine Artillery Regiment.

So well coordinated were the efforts of the company and the efforts of the supporting arms that it seemed that the forward observers anticipated each request and were ready with a fire-mission before the request was initiated. The units worked so well as teams that the defensive fires were arranged without benefit of the company commander stipulating where they should be placed- it was practically an SOP for the observers to arrange the concentrations and barrages and notify the company commander of the locations of each. It was never necessary to change any of them, other than to bring a barrage closer to the front lines. The members of the 593rd JASCO worked equally as well and as readily.

The attached units were well cared for by the company and were always included in briefings as though they were an organic part of the unit. This factor made the personnel of the attached units feel that they "be-

longed" to the unit and fitted into the overall picture as well as any rifle platoon or weapons section.

LESSONS

1. For the minimum of difficulty in any tactical operation, ample time for reconnaissance must be allowed all echelons of command. In the absence of reconnaissance (or augmenting reconnaissance) detailed intelligence of the terrain should be disseminated to the lowest level of command.

2. Many problems, and possibly failure, can be avoided by units of any size by carefully planning every phase of a projected operation.

3. The unit is no better than the leaders or commanders exercising control during an operation. Bold, positive decisions rendered and carried out by aggressive leaders often mean the difference between success and failure.

4. To assure success in an attack against a strongly fortified position and to retain ground taken by the attack, special measures and plans for supply must be adopted.

5. Plans and actions of a tactical unit must remain flexible to the degree that changes of mission, formation, position, or command will not result in unnecessary delay or hesitation.

6. The principle of defense in depth, as advocated by the Infantry School, is an undeniably necessary concept of defense.

7. For successful command of units, adequate communications, especially in the defense against counter-offensives at night, are not only desirable but absolutely necessary.

8. Coordination between supporting and supported arms or units is a primary factor in the achievement of success in tactical operations.